

Holy Trinity Church,
South Sixth St.,
Nashville, Tennessee.

HABS No. TENN-135

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Tennessee

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Frazer Smith, District Officer,
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Addendum to:

Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
615 Sixth Avenue, South
Nashville
Davidson County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-135

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TN-135

HOLY TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

An Addendum to Holy Trinity Church, S. Sixth St.,
Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee

Location: 615 Sixth Ave., South, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee
Latitude: 36°09'09" N. Longitude: 86°46'32" W.

Present Owner and Occupant: Parish of the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

Present Use: Church

Significance: The design for the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church has been attributed to the architectural firm of Wills and Dudley of New York. Begun in 1852, Holy Trinity was modeled after an English parish church, reflecting a type of design for which Frank Wills was renowned. It is acclaimed as one of the outstanding examples of the early Gothic Revival style in Tennessee.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The cornerstone was laid on May 7, 1852, and the chancel was completed in 1853. In 1860, the tower was erected up to the ridge of the roof over the chancel; it was completed in 1887 in substantially the form in which it appears today. On May 27, 1888, the church was consecrated.
2. Architects: The architects are widely held to be Wills and Dudley of New York. W. W. Clayton's History of Davidson County, Tennessee (1880), attributed the design of the church to Wills and Dudley. Prof. W. W. Clayton states that ". . . The edifice is after a design of Wills & Dudley, of New York, an illustration of which appears in this work. . . ." [p. 337, drawing on opposite page]. Evidence to support this attribution has just been discovered in the form of an unpublished manuscript, "The Church of the Holy Trinity, Nashville" (ca. 1895), by P. M. Radford, a Senior Warden and member of this Vestry of the Holy Trinity and subsequently historiographer of the Diocese of Tennessee. He writes simply that ". . . The plan was drawn by Wills & Dudley, Architects of New York. . . ."
3. Original and subsequent owners: In December, 1850, Mr. M. W. Wetmore, one of the owners of Ewing's addition to Nashville, gave the parcel of ground on which the church was erected and now stands [D.C.R.O. Book 14, p. 185]. The building has remained in the tenure and occupancy of the parish of the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church since its construction, except for brief

occupancy in 1862 by the Federal Army and occasional lapses in church activity. The Church was first used by black worshipers in 1895. The present black congregation was organized in 1902, and officially made a mission of the Episcopal Church for Negroes in October, 1907.

4. Original plans: Whether or not the original plans still exist is unknown. Published excerpts from a diary of a young girl, dating from a period contemporary with the construction of the Church of the Holy Trinity, observe that "this was the church of which a later record reports Mr. Tomes' [Rector of Christ Church, Nashville] bringing a drawing for the Hunts [parents of the author of the diary] to see, with a 'roof that is very high and the tower a very peculiar one. . .'" ["Leaves from an Old Diary," Christ Church, Nashville. 1829-1929. Nashville, 1929: 106. From a diary of Mary Elizabeth Hunt]. In speaking of the completion of the tower in 1887, P. M. Radford observed that ". . . The original plan contemplated a spire. . . ." The drawing contained in Clayton's book depicts a spire mounted on top of the tower and may represent the original design.

A sermon delivered on February 5, 1854, by Bishop Otey, at Holy Trinity, provides some insight into the construction of the Church: "The building is of rough stone the walls in the interior being plastered; the roof open wood work and the floors, seats, chancel and all other parts of the building except the walls [,] of cedar timber. The arrangements of the chancel and vestry room are very convenient . . ." [quoted in the manuscript by P. M. Radford]. In his published account of the church, W. W. Clayton observes that the church ". . . is . . . built of [native] blue limestone, and with its open [hammer beam] roof of varnished cedar and its deep recessed chancel it is, indeed, a pure and beautiful piece of architecture. Its altar is of cedar, and a crown of thorns adorns the centre of its frontal. The nave is seventy by thirty-five feet, and has a seating capacity of two hundred and fifty people. . . ." The original roof appears to have been covered with a seamed tin roof.

5. Alterations and additions: P. M. Radford's manuscript provides the most detailed and reliable account of such activity from the date of construction to 1895. The information which follows for this period is taken or quoted from that source.

Between 1858 and 1860, the tower was erected, but "not enough funds could be collected to carry it up further than the walls of the Church."

During the time in 1862 the Federal Army employed the church building as a powder magazine and stable, "the altar was used to cut meat on, the font was used for a wash basin, the organ was carried away, piecemeal . . ., the stained glass window in the chancel was smashed to pieces, and the interior of the church greatly abused."

"This use of the Church was claimed to be a Military necessity for which the Government proposed to pay damages and a guarantee was given to have the Church restored and renovated. An inventory was taken and damages to the amount of sixteen hundred dollars was assessed by the Committee appointed by Federal authority."

"Thirteen hundred and thirty three dollars was paid viz for damage \$1200 and for rent \$133. After the Church had been in a measure restored . . ."

Between 1866 and 1867 there were procured, in part through Christ Church and the Church of the Advent, a beautiful carpet for the chancel and choir, matting for the aisle, and an organ. The chancel window was also restored.

A small frame room for a school was erected on the church lot in 1868.

In 1872, a Mr. Fisher purchased a new pipe organ for \$1300 from the Pilcher & Co. of Chicago.

The vestry room was enlarged and improved in 1883.

The tower was completed in 1887. "The Rectory [Rev. M. Cabel Martin] and Vestry met and resolved to advertize for bids for the work necessary to complete the Tower - As a result the stone work was awarded to Smith and Waters - the woodwork to Watterson and Barrow [-] Tin and Slate work to Newt-Phillips and the work commenced." "The original plan contemplated a spire. The building committee recommended that the spire be omitted and not constructed for the reason that spires on Towers are not always safe - several in the city having been blown down by storms and a better reason for leaving it off, was that the building would look better and be more churchly in appearance without it. The spire was not erected."

"The work was commenced and in about three months thereafter the tower was completed at a cost of \$1725.40." "The whole of the work was carried out as near the original plan as could be and

was eminently successful giving entire satisfaction . . . to the vestry and congregation . . ." In addition, ". . . the interior walls of the Church were given a coat of paint and the edifice was considered ready for consecration.

In May, 1889, ". . . a lot of ground next to the church was purchased for the purpose of creating thereon a Chapel and Sunday school. Lot cost \$500. It was discovered some time previously that one corner of the Church edifice was encroaching [sic] on the lot that did not belong to the parish - and it was feared that at some future day trouble might arise in consequence thereof."

In 1891, ". . . the Ch. property was valued at \$1500 on which there was placed an insurance of \$3000."

A number of improvements were made to the church yard in 1893. The lot was graded and sodded, trees were planted, and a "walk of adamant" was laid; in addition, a new iron fence was put up.

Radford records that "On Dec^r 5th 1893 the portrait of the Rev. Chas. Tomes was presented to the Vestry by Mrs. Judge Reece. This portrait full life size in oil was painted by Mr. Cooper whilst Mr. Tomes was Rector of Christ Church for Mrs. Francis B. Fogg. On the death of Mrs. Fogg the picture passed to her niece Mrs. Reece who, on the death of Judge Reece ceased to keep house and donated the picture to the Church of the Holy Trinity."

A number of changes were made in 1893: "Up to now the seats in the church were not uniform having been placed therein at different dates by different persons - a new set was ordered and presented to the congregation by the following members of the Vestry at a cost of \$185. The Rector Rev^d J. L. Scully, the Sr. Warden Mr. Chas. Shepard, the Jr. Warden Mr. Wm. Hunt, the Treasurer Mr. M. R. Parrish, Mr. H. C. Fisher, Mr. Fred Grass, Mr. W. H. Granderston and Mr. Tom Con. The inner walls were all newly painted . . ."

The alterations made since that time are more difficult to ascertain in the absence of any records to that effect.

A newspaper article reveals that, for the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Church in 1952, numerous renovations were made to the church: new doors were hung, floors and pews were repaired and painted, and the interior generally was redecorated. Lawn lights, donated by Dudley Gale of Nashville, were also installed. [Nashville Banner, May 7, 1952]

From available photographs, it is possible to ascertain that the battlements crowning the turret were removed some time after 1940, because they had become dislodged and were considered a safety hazard.

In an interview with Rev. Cecil H. Cowan, until July 1, 1970, Rector of the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, it was learned that the present pulpit is not original, but was brought from New York and donated by a parishioner approximately thirty-five years ago (ca. 1935). He noted that the stained glass windows with aluminum sashes are not original, save for the upper portion within the spring-line of the lancets. The building was air-conditioned in 1964.

The original seamed tin roofing was covered with asbestos cement shingles. At present, the roofing is of composition material.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Early Views

A drawing of the exterior northeast view of the Church is published in W. W. Clayton's History of Davidson County, Tennessee (Philadelphia, 1880, opposite p. 337). The caption reads, "Church of the Holy Trinity, Nashville, Tennessee." It has been suggested that the spire atop the turret on the northeast corner of the tower was the original design for the Church.

P. M. Radford's unpublished manuscript, "The Church of the Holy Trinity, Nashville" (ca. 1895), contains two revealing views of the Church. The first is a sketch of Holy Trinity, captioned "Trinity Church," to which is added in handwriting, "as it stood for 30 years." The second is the drawing published in Clayton's book [op. cit.], to whose caption is added the handwritten caption "completed in 1887." The drawing is here modified from the original as published, the spire atop the turret erased and the crenelated parapet crowning the turret drawn in its place.

A photograph of the exterior northeast view of the building is published in Christ Church, Nashville, 1829-1929 (Nashville, 1929), opposite p. 177.

A photograph published in Maude Weidner Jessen's Nashville Then and Now, 1780-1930 (Nashville, 1930; p. 19) confirms the first sketch which is contained in P. M. Radford's manuscript.

There are two 1940 HABS photographs; one is an exterior northwest view, the other an exterior southeast view.

2. Bibliography

a. Primary sources:

Radford, P. M. "The Church of the Holy Trinity, Nashville." 13 p. illus. Unpublished manuscript in the Archives and Special Collections of the du Pont Library, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee 37375.

Rankin, Anne, editor-in-chief. "Leaves from an Old Diary," in Christ Church, Nashville, 1829-1929, Nashville, Tenn. Edited extracts from the diary of a young girl, Mary Elizabeth Hunt, depicting events associated with Christ Church and including Holy Trinity, for the period from September, 1846, to January, 1854.

Register's Office for Davidson County, Tennessee.
Deed Book 14, pp. 185-189.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Beard, William E. "The Church of Ante-Bellum Times," in Christ Church, Nashville, 1829-1929. Anne Rankin, editor in chief (Nashville, Tenn.: Marshall & Bruce, 1929), pp. 73-89.

Clayton, W. W. "Church of the Holy Trinity," in his History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880), pp. 337-338, with a sketch opposite p. 337.

Federal Writers' Project. Tennessee: A Guide to the State (New York: Viking Press, 1939), pp. 161, 202.

Green, William M. Memoir of Rt. Rev. James Hervey Otey, D.D., LL. D., The First Bishop of Tennessee. New York: James Pott & Co., 1885.

Noll, Arthur H. History of the Church in the Diocese of Tennessee. New York: James Pott & Co., 1900.

Robert, Charles E. "Church of the Holy Trinity," in his Nashville and Her Trade for 1870 (Nashville: Roberts & Purvis, 1870), p. 449.

Stromquist, Victor H. "Church of the Holy Trinity." Unpublished Inventory Form prepared by the late Nashville architect on October 1, 1956, in his capacity as the Preservation Officer of the local A.I.A. chapter.

Withey, Henry F. and Withey, Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956. See entry on Henry C. Dudley (of Wills and Dudley), pp. 182-183. [note that there is no entry for Frank Wills.]

Wooldridge, John, editor. History of Nashville, Tennessee.
Nashville, Tenn: H. W. Crew, 1890, pp. 490-491.

c. Newspaper accounts:

The Nashville Banner, Nashville, Tennessee.
August 10, 1930, May 7, 1952, June 22, 1955.

Prepared by: Anatole Senkevitch, Jr.
Architectural Historian & Architect
National Park Service
Summer, 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This church is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: L-shaped structure measures approximately 30'x 114'.
2. Foundations: Tennessee limestone ashlar.
3. Walls: Tennessee limestone ashlar, with buttresses between the windows and at every corner.
4. Structural system: Masonry load-bearing walls. Hammerbeam truss is exposed on the interior.
5. Chimneys: The chimney on the east end of the vestry vents a fireplace.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Pointed-arch hollow-core door at main entrance.
 - b. Windows: Fixed, leaded, stained-glass lancet windows throughout.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The steeply pitched gable roof is covered with composition shingles.

- b. Towers: There is a three-story square tower topped with battlements on the north front. Attached to the northeast corner is an octagonal tower which contains circular stairs.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: The main entrance in the belltower leads to the vestibule and sanctuary, beyond which is the chancel. East of the chancel is the vestry.
2. Stairways: Circular stairway in tower connects vestibule with choir loft.
3. Wall and ceiling finish. The hammerbeam truss supporting the roof is exposed stained red cedar. The walls are plastered.

- D. Site: The church faces north on a triangular shaded lot between Ewing Street and 6th Avenue South.

Prepared by Roy C. Pledger
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
June, 1970

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee. Structures were measured and drawn in July, 1970, under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Roy C. Pledger, project supervisor (Texas A & M University), Anatole Senkevitch, Jr., historian (University of Virginia), by student architects Donald W. Graham and William H. Edwards (University of Illinois), and Donna G. Woodrum and Robert J. Dunnay (Virginia Polytechnic Institute), at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. The photographer was Jack E. Boucher of the HABS staff. The written data were edited by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff in June, 1981.